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“Freedom – Is It a Crime?”: Herbert Read’s *The Green Child* and Human Rights in Post-war Britain

Abstract: Modernist author Herbert Read was best known as an art critic, anarchist, and poet, but one of the few works of his which remains in print is his little understood only attempt at fiction: his novel, *The Green Child* (1935). The novel updates a medieval tale about mysterious green-hued children who suddenly appear in a village, and in Read’s work, the so-called Green Children set off a narrative where, I argue, that individual liberties like freedom of movement and political debates around human rights and refugees are staged and thought through. In reapproaching this semi-fantastical tale, I analyse how Read imagines a form of social utopia and also offers commentary on the mid-20th century refugee crisis.

Keywords: Herbert Read, modernist novel, human rights, refugees, immigration, speculative fiction, George Orwell

1. Introduction

In 1946, Arthur Koestler began circulating a proposal for a “League of the Rights of Man,” penned by George Orwell. Koestler was looking for feedback and to generate interest in the idea, which eventually came to nothing. However, among the few respondents, publisher Victor Gollancz wrote a note in the margins of his copy which reads “relation to Herbert Read novel?” Gollancz could have only meant Read’s one novel – *The Green Child*. It is a provocative question: Gollancz nowhere elaborates on his note nor is it immediately obvious why he would have had it in mind. Yet, his reasons may be inferred from a closer analysis of the text and a consideration of the political concerns Read, Orwell, Koestler, and indeed, Gollancz shared in the 1940’s: in particular, their mutual concern over human

rights issues such as freedom of expression and equal treatment under the law. Where Read's initial and immediate context for considering migration crises in the mid-1930's may have been the changes he sensed to his "gentle nest of artists" in Hampstead, the book's republication in 1945 held new significance in light of the population upheavals brought about by the Second World War.¹ As Read's only work of fiction, it dramatises some of Read's political stances, while also creating space to consider a refugee crisis he does not address in his non-fiction work. The novel raises questions about law and governance, as well as how citizenship, place, and belonging impact our access to fundamental rights. Staged in three parts, in three different central locations, around two main characters, *The Green Child* presents the reader with multiple perspectives on how individuals may see themselves in relation to others in the body politic.

Read's writings on art and politics, and in particular his interests in surrealism and anarchism, have been well-covered, especially as of late.² *The Green Child*, on the other hand, while not being overlooked has definitely been under-served. In perhaps the only sustained treatment of the novel as of late – in a collection of essays honouring Read from one of his old publishers, Freedom Press – Leena Kore Schröder suggests throughout her contribution that Read's use of "the uncanny" – or something unsettlingly mysterious – and at least by way of implication, places the text in the tradition of Gothic literature. While this thread is apparent in the work, it is also very much grounded in realist elements as he works his way through different experiments with political revolution and reinvention. The novel reflects aspects of Read's political writings, while never putting itself in the position of advocating for any particular political stance or solution. Ultimately, it works as a creative imagining of what might be possible, while serving as a caution against more totalitarian approaches which had been valorised. In revisiting Read's novel, I analyse how he stages various political situations to comment on social and political assumptions, especially as they are challenged by evolving and changing contexts.

2. Herbert Read, George Orwell, and the Freedom Defence Committee

The Green Child was first published in 1935 and reprinted in 1945 by Grey Walls Press at the suggestion of poet Denise Levertov, a mutual friend of Read's and publisher Wrey Gardiner's (Levertov 12).³ It is this 1945 edition published by Wrey Gardiner – who at the time was active publishing the influential *Poetry Quarterly* – that Gollancz may have been thinking of. Read, by the mid-1940s, was a well-known poet, art critic, and anarchist, who had become associated variously with British Surrealism and various leftist organisations. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, he outlined his ideas on art, politics, and the interrelationship between the two across such works as *Art and Society* (1937), *Poetry and Anarchism* (1938), *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (1940), *To Hell with Culture* (1941),

Education through Art (1943), *Education of Free Men* (1944), *Freedom: Is It a Crime?* (1945), and *Culture and Education in World Order* (1948). He regularly published with Faber and Faber, and he was well-known and well-regarded among leftist circles, especially in London. In the case of George Orwell, while the two were never close intimates, there was enough mutual appreciation between Read and Orwell for the latter to write to Read in early 1939 about the looming war and Orwell's fear of press censorship:

At present there is considerable freedom of the press and no restriction on the purchase of printing presses, stocks of paper etc., but I don't believe for an instant that this state of affairs is going to continue [...]. It seems to me that the common sense thing to do would be to accumulate the things we should need for the production of pamphlets, stickybacks, etc., lay them by in some unobtrusive place and not use them until it became necessary. (Orwell 1998, 313–314)

While nothing came of this idea, it serves as a measure of the trust Orwell had in Read that he felt he could approach Read with an idea he saw as potentially seditious but morally right. They did eventually partner in an organisation called the Freedom Defence Committee (FDC), which was founded towards the end of the Second World War. George Woodcock recounts how Orwell "spoke at a public meeting we [the Freedom Defence Committee] organised in Conway Hall in support of a general amnesty for people still in prison, many months after hostilities had ended, under various wartime laws and regulations" (22). Peter Davison states that a "probable result of this campaign was a half-hour adjournment debate in the House of Commons on 28 November 1945 [...] [in which] the Secretary of State for War announced some mitigation of sentences" (357). The Freedom Defence Committee (FDC) was founded in early 1945 with Herbert Read serving as chairman, Orwell as vice chairman, Woodcock as secretary, and with the involvement of E.M. Forster, Bertrand Russell, Cyril Connolly, among others. According to the FDC constitution, it was "founded to uphold the essential liberty of individuals and organisations and to defend those who are persecuted for exercising their rights to freedom of speech, writing, and action" (1). It called for the abolition of conscription, the Emergency Powers Act, and the Defence Regulations, and promised action "publicly, through protest meetings, articles, and letters in the press, etc. [...] [and] legal and financial aid wherever this is necessary and possible" (2).

As opposed to what appears to be Read's longer-lasting and committed involvement with the FDC, Orwell's involvement in the organisation appears to have been a result of his distaste for the perceived ineffectiveness of another rights advocacy group – the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) – and its infiltration by the Communist Party (Crick 497). He would not have been alone in this feeling about the NCCL. Chris Moores had addressed the very question of CPGB infiltration of the NCCL, and concludes that it was never more than a

narrative Special Branch wished to peddle, and that it may have not understood the difference between communist and popular front activities and organisations (50-6). Even so, it was a perception which lingered for some time. For example, Amnesty International founder Peter Benenson would not work with the NCCL until after its re-organisation in 1963 which convinced him that it was finally free of communist influence (Moore 112–113). Despite Orwell's general concern about communist infiltration and his specific misgivings about the FDC, he retained his association with them, even as in the fall and winter of 1945 he was already thinking of establishing a separate organisation as, according to Bernard Crick, Orwell "found that the Freedom Defence Committee was too narrowly concerned with defending British Left-wingers prosecuted for political reasons" (497). Even as he stuck with the FDC, Orwell explored an alternate option while drafting his "League of the Rights of Man." Yet, before an exploration of what possible connection *The Green Child* has to Orwell's proposal for a new league can be attempted, the structure and plot of the novel must be explained, and in particular, those elements which pertain to the discussions around structures of governance and the rights of citizens.

3. *The Green Child*

The Green Child opens with the faked death of its main character Olivero. Olivero has decided to end his time as a dictator of the fictional South American country of Roncador and return to the village of his birth in England. On his way from the train station to the village of his birth, he notices the river seems to be flowing in the wrong direction and while trying to confirm his memory of its flow follows it to the old mill. He happens upon a strange scene of a man attempting to force feed the blood of a lamb to a woman whose skin has a greenish hue. It is then that Olivero remembers the story of the Green Children who had appeared in his village thirty years ago shortly after he had left. He recognises the man as a one-time former pupil, who now claims to be in charge of the care of this Green Child. The scene sets the tone and the terms for the remainder of the novel: wherever we are geographically in the novel, there is at least one key character out of place, and the scene rests on the tension of that character's displacement from the familiar and the known. As for the Green Children, as Olivero learns, a boy and a girl with green skin emerged unclothed from the moors, unable to speak any known language or in any way communicate where they came from or their condition. They were eventually taken in by a local woman, and the boy died shortly thereafter after he refused to eat anything offered and wasted away.

The present-day of the first part of the novel is 1860, and the appearance of the children is given as 1830, but Read is referencing an old tale which dates back to the 12th century. In William of Newburgh's *History of English Affairs*, he details

the appearance of two Green Children around the town of Woolpit in East Anglia (William of Newburgh 115–116). Read’s adaptation of the tale does not vary much beyond his modernisation of the tale, except for William of Newburgh’s detail that the boy dies shortly after his baptism. Whatever its precise details, the tale itself is clearly one of racial difference and cultural diversity. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has emphasised that race, while a complicated category to define in 12th-century Norman England remains a useful one when discussing the tale of the Green Children:

Race is constructed not only through inert signs like dermal pigmentation, but also through the embodied performance of identity: food consumed, language spoken, customs observed, sexuality practiced. Because it buttresses uneven distributions of power while emplacing the distinctions between dominating and subaltern groups in the body, race is [...] dangerous – and therefore also the best term for capturing the *force* of differences thought to separate medieval people. (76)

The Green Children, whom Cohen sees as reminders of the difference inserted into Anglo-Saxon England following the Norman conquest, even as their assimilation or death represents the eventual disappearance of “Norman-ness” from English life (87). Brought into Industrial England, Read makes them markers of the displacement brought about by rapid industrialisation and global colonisation. The boy’s failure to assimilate and the girl’s partial assimilation – the lamb’s blood we learn was a failed attempt by Olivero’s former pupil to take care of the girl – establish the ineluctable cost of modernisation and the inability of difference to survive in modernisation’s wake. The first part closes with Olivero following the Green Child to the source of the river and the two of them sinking through marshland at the river’s source.

The second part, now told from Olivero’s perspective in the first person, details his journey from his village to South America. Along the way he holds a job in London; journeys to a village south of Warsaw and delivers money to the Jewish mother of his London-based employer; ends up in Germany where he books passage to Morocco; he is jailed in Morocco for two years for carrying a copy of Voltaire (which was perceived as incriminating literature of a revolutionary nature); he learns Spanish and gains a network of friends who were also jailed revolutionaries; is freed and sails to Buenos Aires on a pirate ship; is boarded by an English vessel on the way, gets arrested and then released and sent to Buenos Aires once his English identity is established; and then, because of the ship he arrived on, is confused for another person in an underground revolutionary movement in Buenos Aires and is sent to Roncador to aid in the toppling of the Spanish-run government. It is here the second, and longest, part of the book begins in earnest, but his roundabout manner in arriving at his destination precisely established Olivero’s peripatetic nature and offers a stark contrast to the locals wherever he goes – be

it his home village, Morocco, Buenos Aires, or eventually in Roncador. People see in Olivero what they wish, inscribing their desires onto him, and never truly interrogate who he is or where he comes from.

The heart of the second part focuses on Olivero's successful aiding of a revolution, writing a constitution, planning a government, and eventually taking over that government for over two decades. We see in this part what kind of government Read wished were possible given the constraints of the potential of its population, external political forces, and of course, economic conditions:

All men being endowed by Universal Providence with the same faculties, the same sensations, and the same needs, by this very fact it was intended by Providence that they should have a right to an equal share of the earth's bounty. Since the bounty is sufficient for all needs, it follows that all men can exist in equal liberty, each the master of his own destiny.

Equality and liberty are the essential attributes of man, two laws of his being, elements of his very nature. Men unite to cultivate the earth and live on its fruits, and for this purpose they enter into mutual contracts; for every service freely rendered a just share of wealth is given. Liberty and equality are guaranteed by justice, which is the principle of government in a society of free men. (Read 1945, 71)

I will explore this aspect in more detail below, but it is important to point out that the Proclamation contains echoes of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Immanuel Kant's *To Perpetual Peace* (1795) in its prioritisation of the rights of citizens and the establishment of equality as a binding principle among all under the law. Yet, what is most notable is that Read presents us with the Proclamation in its totality, and then has the reader follow Olivero through the various administrative issues he faced over the years.

Olivero, in working through the governance of Roncador, has to face the question of what his role, any individual's role, in society can and must be, and that role can and must relate to others:

I might have introduced a system of education, and thus have created a society of intellectual beings. I might in that way have put an end to my boredom, but I should have disrupted the peace of the state by creating a class absorbed in visionary speculations, eager to translate their ideological projects into action. (Read 1945, 106)

In crafting a self-sustaining agrarian utopia, Olivero had failed to cultivate an intelligentsia, an enlightened ruling class. He had been content to run everything himself but fell victim to this crucial oversight. The aporia in his thinking and his approach is himself. As his rule slowly but surely takes on a more dictatorial aspect, he becomes detached from the very people he once felt he belonged to. Even in the act of creating his own country, Olivero remains a foreign presence in

the populace. Once he recognises this moment, he decides, as the opening of the book shows us, to remove himself definitively from the scene.

In the third part of the book, we discover what happened after Olivero and the Green Child sink through the water. They find themselves in the Green Child’s land, inhabited by a people whose customs and practices are wholly unlike anything Olivero has experienced and the supreme objective of life there is solitary contemplation in a cave where one eventually turns into a form of crystal. First, Olivero is met with the same shock the villagers expressed meeting the Green Children for the first time:

[T]he moment he moved towards them, they stared back in horror, as though they had been confronted with a ghost. And indeed, as such or worse than such, Olivero appeared to them; for actually the people of this country had no belief in disembodied spirits, and no knowledge of the different races of the world. In Olivero they suddenly saw a totally new species of human being; but only if you imagine a world in which there are no species, but only a single genus of mankind, can you get the measure of their surprise. (Read 1945, 115)

How Olivero appears to people he has never met in places he has never been before, and his eventual assimilation into those communities form the central actions of the book. By way of comparison, note his appearance once he arrives in Buenos Aires:

On leaving the prison I had acquired a Spanish hat, wide of brim and high in the crown. I wore a dark brown shirt and a red neckerchief, and instead of a coat, carried across my shoulder my sailor’s blanket; the few possessions I was left with were tied in a bundle which I carried in my hand. Until I reached the threshold of the room I was unperceived. (Read 1945, 50)

Through a combination of fortune and intention, Olivero was able to blend in to the community in Buenos Aires, and quite successfully as he is mistaken for another man, in a way which is not available to him in this new land. It is only when a panel of five judges in the Green Child’s land decides that Olivero may join the community does he begin to learn their language, their ways of perceiving the world, and their actions and customs. He is, in the end, able to assimilate to a degree the Green Children were not, or perhaps, were never given the opportunity to do so. Olivero’s passage through the various stages of life in this community – from assimilation to practice to contemplation to, ultimately, a process referred to as “crystallisation,” wherein the individual physiologically transforms into crystals – offer a counterpoint to his search for cultural belonging through governing others portrayed in the second part. In the Green Child’s world, individuals are nameless, often paired, and are always unquestionably present and active in whichever activity they are involved in.

4. Rights, Refugees, and Natural Society

As was mentioned earlier, the key political passage of the book contains Olivero's proclamation for the new government of Roncador. Seemingly modelled after sentiments expressed in the French Assembly's 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Kant's *To Perpetual Peace*, the proclamation works as a reminder for the mid-20th-century reader of the high ideals of 19th-century liberal internationalism. The Declaration of the Rights of Man was a blueprint for numerous liberal causes in the 19th century as it foregrounded the rights of individuals within nations and the right of self-determination of nations. Kant, in writing *To Perpetual Peace*, proceeds from the assertion that governments, in order to do business successfully, would have to assume a peaceful posture towards one another and lays out six preliminary articles and three definitive articles for how this may occur, the third of which – namely, the right to universal hospitality – will be discussed below. Kant's work influenced a kind of liberal internationalism – that is, a form of liberalism which, as Beate Jahn notes, valued the “spread of democracy and respect for human rights to all states and peoples as well as an influential role for international organisations in the pursuit of these aims” (1). We see liberal internationalist ideologies expressed during Read's lifetime in international organisations like the League of Nations, and eventually, the United Nations, but its impact was felt at more local levels as, for example, expressed by progressive societies in the UK like the FDC and in some ways Orwell's proposal for a League of the Rights of Man.

While it is important to stress nothing came of Orwell's proposal for a new league, the document was circulated and sparked a conversation between a few writers in early 1946, including Victor Gollancz. Gollancz's reference to *The Green Child* was possibly sparked by two assertions in the proposal: (1) the need for an overhaul of the 19th-century vision of the Rights of Man, and (2) a recognition of the intertwined nature of the international community. As for the former, Orwell opens his proposal warning against a tendency for repeating past errors:

During the past fifty years it has become apparent that the Nineteenth Century conception of liberty and democracy was insufficient. Without equality of opportunity and a reasonable degree of equality in income, democratic rights have little value [...]. But the tendency, especially since the Russian revolution, has been to over-emphasise this fact and to talk as though the economic aspect were the only one [...]. Both Communists and Fascists have reiterated that liberty without social security is valueless, and it has been forgotten that without liberty there can be no security. (1946, 1)⁴

This warning against valuing economic concerns over individual liberties echoes the core crisis during Olivero's reign over Roncador: while his proclamation pays lip service to the idea of freedom and equality amongst its citizens, and Olivero takes great pride in the self-sustaining economy in the nation he runs, he never

implements any social agendas which would improve fundamental rights like access to education or a free press. The result leads to a dead end with Olivero serving as a kind of benign, accidental dictator without any obvious way to transition power to another political body or individual and a population without any other function than to labour to produce goods to sustain a national economy. The totalitarianism of Roncador, however unintentionally arrived at, takes shape when the economics of the state take precedence over the liberties of its citizens.

The other assertion linking the proposal to *The Green Child* concerns the liberal internationalist sentiment expressed in Orwell's document, especially that his League should centrally coordinate and communicate the activities of already existing like-minded groups across the globe, and the assertion that its members should "advocate of infringements against the Rights and dignity of Man, whether they occur in the British Empire or in Russian occupied territory" (1946, 2). *The Green Child* has an impressively international scope – Olivero bounces from England to Poland, Germany, Morocco, Argentina, and eventually the fictional country of Roncador which appears to share a border with Argentina, and then ultimately back to his village and the otherworldly land of the Green People. In all these locations we learn some detail about its local politics – for example, in Warsaw, we witness a criminal being very publicly incarcerated (he is paraded through the streets serenaded by a booing crowd); in Morocco, Olivero feels the influence of European politics on North Africa as he is jailed for possessing a copy of a book by a French political philosopher and is surrounded by only Spanish-speaking inmates; and in South America, he immediately finds himself at the forefront of a coup. More precisely, we are made to feel Olivero's estrangement from these locations – he can only guess at what he is seeing in Warsaw and has to rely on a note written in Polish by his employer who has sent him there to get him around; in Morocco, he is thrown in jail ultimately for his naivete and initially does not speak the language; and his involvement in the coup is the result of a case of mistaken identity. In other words, the novel recognises the reach of historic European liberal politics internationally while also emphasising the difficulties individual citizens encounter once they step out of their national borders.

The challenges presented by the ideal of an international set of shared liberal principles in the late-18th to early-19th century was influentially addressed by Immanuel Kant. Kant's *To Perpetual Peace* is apropos here, especially his "Third Definitive Article for a Perpetual Peace" which calls for the "Cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality" (15). Kant argues here that individuals have a right to another country's hospitality upon arrival in that country:

If it can be done without destroying him, he can be turned away, but, as long as he behaves peaceably he cannot be treated as an enemy. He may request the *right* to be a *permanent visitor* (which would require a special, charitable agreement to make him a fellow inhabitant for a certain period), but the *right to visit*, to associate, belongs

to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth's surface, for since the earth is a globe, they cannot scatter themselves infinitely, but must, finally, tolerate living in close proximity, because originally no one had a greater right to any region of the earth than anyone else. (15–16; original emphasis)

In some respects, Read's novel, through the figure of Olivero, tests the claim that individuals "cannot scatter themselves infinitely," but the titular character best represents Kant's claim here. The central dilemma put forward by the appearance of the Green Children involves this question of hosting – how does a community incorporate individuals who come from outside its borders? The death of one Green Child and the partial acculturation of the second (arguably also a failure as the first scene with the force feeding shows) demonstrate the village's inability to play host in Kantian terms. On the other hand, the political ideal Read explores in the land of the Green People involves a more successfully realised form of hosting. Olivero's arrival is wholly unprecedented, but the Green People, in Kant's terms, "tolerate [Olivero] living in close proximity." Olivero is only granted a right to visit after a panel of five judges deliberate, and ultimately agree to host him as part of their community. They eventually decide to treat him like everyone else, so his assimilation comes through consensus – he has become a "permanent visitor" in this land.

The Green Child, even as it proved to be Read's only foray into fiction writing, in many respects incorporates his political writings from the period. For example, Read writes elsewhere about his vision for a "natural society" which embodies many of the elements he puts in place in Roncador, and also carries it with it the very strong mark of the influence of Kant's *To Perpetual Peace*. In "The Politics of the Unpolitical," Read argues that a natural society should, among others, embody the following features: "I. The liberty of the person [...]. V. The abolition of parliament and centralised government [...]. VII. The delegation of authority. VIII. The humanisation of industry" (1943, 11). Olivero attempts the first feature, but ultimately fails because he does not successfully prioritise numbers V, VII, and VIII. In the land of the Green People, there is no central authority, everything is delegated, and all work is in the service of others and everyone works. Most importantly, there is no evidence of discord or want anywhere. For Read, following Kant, these features he lists are fundamentally pacific and international largely because they "aim at the production of worldwide plenty, at the humanisation of work, and at the eradication of all economic conflicts" (1943, 11). In such a society, nationalisms and tensions around cultural differences would melt away as meaningful political markers. Yet, while Read's liberal internationalism is clear in his political writings, he does not articulate how his natural society would process "otherness." In other words, his internationalism assumes a lack of mobility or displacement brought on by war or economic hardship. While he imagines a Utopic near-future where such problems cease to exist, and despite developing a solution for hosting foreigners with Olivero's case at the end of his novel, Read never thoroughly theorises what ought to be done

with the greatest challenge presented to an international liberal order after 1945, namely, the refugee crisis brought on by the Second World War.

The political challenge brought by displaced persons was of growing concern in the opening decades of the 20th century, and *The Green Child*'s original 1935 publication date means that Read may have had the refugee crises produced by the Russian Revolution, the First World War, or even the early years of Nazi oppression of Jews in Germany on his mind (Torpey 124–127). Wrey Gardiner's 1945 interest in taking up Denise Levertov's suggestion may have certainly been motivated by how acute the problem had become in the intervening ten years. The Green Children in his story function as a reminder to the local English villagers that they are part of a larger world, a world they have a history in colonising and subjugating. As Cohen emphasises about the Green Children of Woolpit, they live in land adjacent to the village and "are surrounded by people who want to change their pastoral mode of life [...] to acculturate them just as the contemporary Welsh (and Irish and Scots) were being forcibly anglicised" (90). The girl only ever partially assimilates and the boy dies from being unable to. The dominant culture remains intact, and Olivero must find his Utopic ideal on a different plane of existence.

By the end of the Second World War, there were a large number of displaced persons in Britain. The reprinting of this novel in 1945 would hold clear resonances for the politically attuned reader at the time. As Katherine Cooper has explained, writing on this situation in Britain, that "[t]he very presence of the refugee represents not simply a challenge to [...] social norms, but rather a disruption which demands attention and elicits political and social change both within and without the space of the home" (193). She refers to refugees as "threshold figures [...] [who] occupy simultaneously the space of the past (the war they have come from, the country they have left), the present (their adopted country, their adopted home) and the future (their plans to return home, their hopes for rebuilding their country) [...] [and who] in the domestic space of the home, where each represents a point of rupture, bringing the war into the safety of the domestic space, and demanding an engagement with the political processes outside" (193, 194). At first blush, the Green Children may appear to have nothing in common with the refugees of the Second World War, especially as Read treats the Green People's own land as a Utopic ideal. However, for reasons they are unable to articulate, and the villagers are never able to grasp, they leave that idyllic space for what proves to be more trying and tragic circumstances. The reader learns in the third part that the Green Children got lost in their own land and accidentally found themselves at the village, but this is never known by the villagers, nor any of the details of the land which they came from. The hosts' inability to understand the motivations, background, and lives of their guests is the shared element. It is this failure to host which forms the core of Olivero's dilemma, and is the founding crisis which starts off the novel. If the novel holds a lesson, it lies in these Kantian terms of hosting and visiting.

5. Conclusion

Herbert Read was able to explore in his fiction something he does not quite grapple with in his political writings – namely, the question posed by modern statelessness. Lyndsey Stonebridge has argued that for mid-century writers “writing about displacement was a powerful way of thinking about rights, citizenship, and sovereignty at the moment when the question of what it meant to belong to a nation, at least in Europe, was its most vexed” (19). In his thinking on a world without centralised governments, a forward-looking idealism overtook his focus, and did not seem to permit attention to the complicated present of this particular crisis. And yet, in his novel, where he is meant to describe a plausible facsimile of 19th-century political governance, he is able to draw our attention to the question of displaced persons in our midst. Or, as Stonebridge conceives her authors asking, “what kind of political, legal, moral, and psychic life might we imagine existing *between* national citizenship and statelessness?” (19). In the case of Read’s *The Green Child*, the answer is itself hidden and displaced. Olivero fails at educating the children of his village, fails to build an educated country in Roncador, and can only seek self-education in a contemplative life shut off in a cave from the rest of the world. It is not a hopeful message to end on, but the novel presents to the reader several difficult challenges to contemplate for themselves, and in this manner, maintains its continued value.

Notes

1. See Herbert Read’s memories of 1930’s Hampstead in “A Gentle Nest of Artists.” *Apollo* 77.7 (September 1962): 536–539; and Monica Bohm-Duchen’s overview of the area in relation to the increasing late-1930’s refugee crisis in “Modernist Sanctuary: Hampstead in the 1930’s and 1940’s.”
2. For more recent scholarship, see Michael Paraskos ed. 2008. *Rereading Read: New Views on Herbert Read*. London: Freedom Press and Matthew S. Adams. 2015. *Kropotkin, Read, and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
3. For more on Levertov’s friendship with Read, see Donna Krolik Hollenberg. 2013. *A Poet’s Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
4. I would like to thank Bill Hamilton from the George Orwell Estate for permission to quote from this draft.

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